

Message Text

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TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

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S E C R E T STATE 206103 TOSEC 100308

EXDIS MILITARY ADDRESSEE HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

FOLLOWING REPEAT LISBON 5012, SENT SECSTATE, INFO BONN,
LONDON, MADRID, MOSCOW, PARIS, ROME, STOCKHOLM, NATO, AUGUST
29:

QUOTE S E C R E T LISBON 5012

EXDIS

DEPT PLEASE PASS TO SECRETARY'S PARTY, SECDEF, CIA, DIA WASHDC,
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4

TAGS: PINT, PO

SUBJECT: MELO ANTUNES GROUPS ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SITUATION

SUMMARY: MELO ANTUNES GROUP ("THE 9") SEES THREE POSSIBLE
SCENARIOS OVER THE WEEKEND: COSTA GOMES RESIGNS AND PRO-
COMMUNIST AFM ASSEMBLY DESIGNATES NEW PRESIDENT; NAVY CHIEF
OF STAFF PINHEIRO DE AZEVEDO, A WEAK FIGURE SUBJECT TO PCP
MANIPULATION, IS ASKED TO FORM A GOVERNMENT; OR COSTA GOMES
AGAIN TEMPORIZES. LAST SCENARIO IS MOST LIKELY (EMBASSY
AGREES). ALL ARE UNPALATABLE TO "THE 9". IT APPEARS MORE
AND MORE LIKELY THAT "THE 9" WILL SHIFT ITS STRATEGY TO A
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MILITARY-CIVILIAN POWER MOVE STARTING IN THE NORTH OF THE COUNTRY

AND GRADUALLY ISOLATING LISBON. INFO ADDRESSEES REQUESTED TO HOLD THIS INFORMATION CLOSELY AND NOT REVEAL WE IN REGULAR COMMUNICATION WITH "THE 9". END SUMMARY

1. AS DEPARTMENT AWARE EMBASSY HAD INDIRECT CHANNEL TO MELO ANTUNES GROUP ("THE 9") WHICH WE AND THEY HAVE BEEN USING WITH SOME FREQUENCY. IN THE INTERESTS OF KEEPING OTHER POSTS INFORMED I AM DOWNGRADING OUR REPORTS HENCEFORTH FROM NODIS TO EXDIS, BUT I WOULD URGE INFO ADDRESSEES NOT TO REVEAL WE IN REGULAR COMMUNICATION WITH ANTUNES AND TO KEEP OUR INFORMATION HELD EXTREMELY CLOSELY. TO MY KNOWLEDGE WE ARE ONLY EMBASSY WITH WHICH "9" IS COMMUNICATING.

2. REPORT RECEIVED LAST NIGHT INDICATES "THE 9" SEES THREE POSSIBLE SCENARIOS BETWEEN NOW AND END OF WEEKEND:

(A) COSTA GOMES'S RESIGNATION. THEY CONSIDER THIS A NET LOSS SINCE NEW PRESIDENT WOULD PRESUMABLY BE DESIGNATED BY PRO-COMMUNIST ASSEMBLY OF AFM. (THERE IS SOME SPECULATION IN TODAY'S PRESS ABOUT POSSIBLE COSTA GOMES RESIGNATION.) "THE 9" SEES THIS SCENARIO AS HAVING VERY LOW (5 TO 10 PERCENT) PROBABILITY.

(B) COSTA GOMES ASKS PINHEIRO DE AZEVEDO, NAVY CHIEF OF STAFF, TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT. (THIS ALSO BEING SPECULATED IN THE PRESS.) "THE 9" SEES THIS AS ACCEPTABLE TO PCP, SINCE PINHEIRO DE AZEVEDO WHILE NOT A COMMUNIST, IS WEAK AND SUSCEPTIBLE TO MANIPULATION. (OTHER MEMBERS OF "THE 9" HAVE TOLD US THAT PINHEIRO DE AZEVEDO OWES HIS STARS TO COMMUNIST GROUP WITHIN THE NAVY.) WHILE PINHEIRO DE AZEVEDO WOULD BE BAD, ROSA COUTINHO, WHO ALSO HARBORS AMBITIONS, WOULD BE INFINITELY MORE DANGEROUS BECAUSE HE IS MORE CLEVER. ONE RISK WHICH ACCOMPANIES THIS SCENARIO IS THAT EITHER AZEVEDO OR ROSA COUTINHO COULD OBTAIN BACKING OF NAVY MARINES, ONE OF THE BETTER ORGANIZED MILITARY UNITS. "THE 9" ALSO SEES LOW PROBABILITY FOR THIS SCENARIO.

(C) COSTA GOMES ASKS FOR MORE TIME. THIS WOULD PLAINLY GIVE PCP AN OPPORTUNITY TO ACCELERATE ITS OFFENSIVE. AS PART OF THIS OFFENSIVE FONMIN RUIVO HAS SENT INSTRUCTIONS TO DIPLOMATIC POSTS TO CONDUCT CAMPAIGN OF SUPPORT FOR VASCO GONCALVES GOVERNMENT. THOSE AMBASSADORS WHO DON'T GET RESULTS HAVE BEEN INFORMED THEY WILL BE REPLACED.

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3. "THE 9" BELIEVES OPTION C IS THE MOST LIKELY. EMBASSY AGREES, GIVEN COSTA GOMES'S TRACK RECORD. "THE 9" FINDS ALL THREE UNPALATABLE. IT IS ALMOST INEVITABLE, THEREFORE, THAT "THE 9" WILL HEAD NORTH AND IMPLEMENT ITS NEW STRATEGY (FOR INFO ADDRESSEES, THIS STRATEGY INVOLVES SETTING UP HEADQUARTERS IN THE NORTH AND EXTENDING MILITARY CONTROL WITH CIVILIAN SUPPORT STEADILY SOUTH, WITH MORE AND MORE UNITS DECLAR-

ING THEMSELVES, GRADUALLY ISOLATING LISBON AND POSSIBLY CUTTING OFF ITS SUPPLIES OF FOOD, ELECTRICITY, ETC.

4. "THE 9" ASSESSES THE BALANCE OF FORCES AS FOLLOWS:

(A) OTELO IS DEFINITELY WITH "THE 9".

(B) THE CENTRAL AND NORTHERN REGIONS ARE SOLIDLY WITH "THE 9". PCP HAS NO CHANCE OF INFLUENCING THE CENTRAL MILITARY REGION CONTROLLED BY CHARAIS. IN THE NORTH, CORVACHO HAS NOT RETURNED TO HIS COMMAND; HE PROBABLY WOULD NOT BE ALLOWED BACK IN HIS HEADQUARTERS AND CERTAINLY WOULD NOT BE OBEYED. (FYI: "THE 9", WORKING WITH THE PSP AND PPD, HAS BEEN BEHIND THE POPULAR OPPOSITION TO CORVACHO.)

(C) VASCO GONCALVES' SOLID CIVILIAN AND MILITARY SUPPORT IS LIMITED TO ALENTEJO.

(D) THE BREAKDOWN IN MILITARY DISCIPLINE IS LIMITED TO THE LISBON AREA. OTHER AREAS, PARTICULARLY NORTH, HAVE GOOD, DISCIPLINED UNITS. (COMMENT: NO MENTION WAS MADE OF LISBON PCP PARA-MILITARY GROUPS BUT THEY ARE A REAL FACTOR IN BALANCE OF FORCES. EMBASSY WILL TRY TO GIVE DEPARTMENT ITS OVERALL SCORECARD ASAP.)

5. ON AN HISTORICAL NOTE, "THE 9" BLAMES FABIAO'S BACKDOWN IN FACE OF COMMUNIST THREATS FOR FAILURE TO DISLODGE VASCO GONCALVES. AS THEY HAD PREVIOUSLY TOLD US, VASCO GONCALVES HAD HELD OUT FOR POST OF CHIEF OF STAFF BUT "9" REFUSED TO ACCEPT THIS ON BASIS THAT PORTUGAL WOULD LOSE ALL CREDIBILITY WITH WESTERN ALLIES.

6. COMMENT: AS EMBASSY WILL REPORT SEPARATELY, YESTERDAY'S SECOND DEADLINE FOR VASCO GONCALVES'S RESIGNATION PASSED WITHOUT ANY ACTION. FRENETIC MEETINGS OF ARMED FORCES'S CHIEFS OF STAFF, RUMP REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL AND COSTA GOMES CONTINUE. CHANCES OF AN ACCEPTABLE POLITICAL SOLUTION ARE
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GETTING SLIMMER AS EACH HOUR PASSES. OUR ASSESSMENT IS THAT "THE 9" MEAN BUSINESS WHEN THEY TALK ABOUT GOING TO THE NORTH, ALTHOUGH THEY MAY WAIT UNTIL THE VERY LAST MINUTE BEFORE THEY DO SO. THEY, LIKE EVERYONE ELSE, IN THIS DRAMA (ESPECIALLY COSTA GOMES) WANT TO AVOID THE ACCUSATION THAT THEY STARTED CIVIL WAR. CARLUCCI UNQUOTE. INGERSOLL

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